

Author's Compliments

Centennial Sermon,

The Fathers of Upper Canada,

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

Sermon, preached before Staff Officers 45th Battalion, and Officers and Men of No. 1 Company, Volunteers, in St. John's Church, Bowmanville, on Sunday, 13th July, 1884, by the Rector, the

REV. A. MACNAB, D.D.,

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CENTENNIAL SERMON.

THERE is perhaps no civilized nation, or savage tribe, in which veneration is not felt for a remote ancestry. With what strange pleasure does the Scottish mountaineer listen "through the livelong night," to the wild notes of the border minstrel! With what transport do the wild men of America recount in the rude war song, the valour and sufferings of their forefathers; and how does it charm away sleep from the little prattler by our fireside, to hear the simplest tales of *other times*!

There is somewhere a chord in our "harp of a thousand strings," which is mysteriously touched by every whisper that steals upon us from regions and objects over which a remote period has cast a solemn and deepening shade.

There can be no doubt, that this deep and heart-stirring interest in the antiquities of the nation or community to which men belong, and this innate reverence for their ancestors, may be carried to an extreme. Extravagant panegyric never fails to detract, even from a well-earned reputation—and when men ascribe that glory to their fathers, which belongs only to the Sovereign of the universe, such impiety deserves the severest reprehension.

But something more than mere cold and casual allusions, is certainly due to the memory of those, from whom, under God, a happy posterity have received all their civil and religious blessings. And if ever the founders of a community were entitled to live in the grateful recollection of all generations, this honor belongs pre-eminently to the first settlers of Upper Canada. Surely the United Empire Loyalists, who were its fathers, and to whom their descendants are indebted for richer blessings than any other people ever enjoyed, *ought* "to be had in everlasting remembrance." For, it is not too much to say that, the whole world may safely be challenged to produce a single example of sound wisdom, high minded patriotism, and marvellous forecast of the future, in the *founders* of any *ancient*, or *modern* community, which can for a moment be compared with the instance which Western Canada has furnished. But, in celebrating their virtues let us not forget who it was that endowed them with such *uncommon* powers, *mental*, *moral* and *physical*. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work *Thou* didst in their days, in the times of old." Had this passage been designed by the sacred writer, for our recent celebrations of the Centennial of the Province of Ontario, it could not have been more appropriate; and were our fathers now permitted to appear, and write their own memorial in the skies, it would most certainly begin and end with, "Not unto us, O God, not unto us, but to Thy name give glory." And it is a

most gratifying fact to record, that throughout the joyful solemnities of the last few weeks our people have steadily kept their eye upon the hand of God, scarcely less visible in the first settlement and subsequent prosperity of Upper Canada, than it had been, in behalf of His ancient people to whom reference is made in our text. In the Psalm, whence it is taken, the *Church* is taught to own with thankfulness, to the glory of God, the great things He had done for *Israel's fathers*.

And to-day, the *Church*—which “is a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ,” teaches us that every age owes to posterity, to keep an account of God’s works of wonder, and to transmit the knowledge of them to the next generation. Of this we have in the Scripture a sure word of history, as sure as the word of prophecy. “One generation” says David, “shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts.” “The fathers to the children,” says good king Hezekiah, “shall make known Thy truth.” The *less* praise this allows *us*, the more comfort it administers, that we may see all our successes and enlargements, coming from the favour of God, and the light of His countenance. This principle was solemnly maintained in the recent Centennial celebration at Adolphustown, where, in laying the corner stone of a memorial church there, His Honour, Lieutenant Governor Robinson, a descendant of a distinguished U. E. Loyalist family, said “we lay this stone of foundation to the honour and glory of God, and in memory of the United Empire Loyalists, who, a hundred years ago, laid the corner stone of our Province in peace and righteousness, and in loyalty to the British crown and empire.”

And a scene of touching sublimity was witnessed at the Pavilion, Toronto, on centenary day, when, in the presence of an immense concourse, the Lord Bishop of Niagara, Dr. Fuller, a native Canadian, accorded their public recognition of divine Providence in the early settlement and subsequent prosperity of Upper Canada, and closed the festivities of that grand occasion by pronouncing the Apostolic benediction. What added much to the impressiveness of the scene was the consideration that from his lordship’s great age and feeble health it was probably one of the very last acts of his official life.

Another similar Centennial celebration is shortly to take place on the old historic plains at Niagara.

Ontario has a noble parentage, the remembrance of which its inhabitants may well cherish with respect, affection and pride. To do full justice to the fathers of Upper Canada, would require the collecting, arranging, and digesting materials for several volumes. It must be obvious, upon a moment’s reflection, that the limits of a single discourse will barely admit of a very general and rapid outline. The utmost to which I can aspire on this occasion, is to exhibit a brief and intelligible sketch of the ordering and protection of a wise and mysterious Providence in the sacrifices, sufferings, perils, and deliverances of our Upper Canadian fathers—together with a few of the prominent features of their character,

and the happy result of the whole in the unexampled well-being of three generations.

In briefly tracing the chain of events which led to the first settlement—a hundred years ago, of Western Canada, I shall begin with the causes that operated to bring to our shores about ten thousand American loyalists. The "United Empire Loyalist" was one who advocated, or wished to have maintained, the unity of the British empire, who felt as much a Briton in the colony of America, as if he were in old England, Ireland, or Scotland; who desired to perpetuate British monarchical rule in America; not blindly believing that no imperfections could exist in such rule, but desiring to seek reform not in a rebellious but conservative spirit. This class became, as the tide of rebellion in the 13 revolted colonies—now the U. States—gained strength and violence, exceedingly abnoxious to those who had arrayed themselves against their king and Parliament. Dr. Canniff, the admirable historian of the early settlement of the Bay of Quinte, by the U. E. Loyalists, himself one of their most enthusiastic descendants, divides them into three classes, viz. :—

1. Those who were forced to leave the revolted provinces during the contest, many of whom took part in the war.
2. Those who were driven away after the war, because they were known or suspected to have sympathy with the loyalist party.
3. Those who would not remain in the Republic who voluntarily forsook the land of their birth or adoption and removed to a country which acknowledged the sovereignty of the king of England.

The majority of those who settled Upper Canada, were natives of the old British Provinces of New York, Pennsylvania and the New England States, but there came, as well, many a true son of England, Ireland, and Scotland, as also a sprinkling of Huguenots and Germans. This noble class preferred to enter a wilderness and hew out for themselves and their children, a new home under the good "old flag which for a thousand years has braved the battle and the breeze."

From the accumulated testimony of those who have supplied statements of family history, it could be easily shown how cruel were the persecutions raised against them, how relentless the spirit of revengefulness. During the rebellion the Loyalists having been stripped of their rights and property, driven from their homes, killed at pleasure, at the close of the war were exiled from all right of residence and citizenship, their enemies having taken possession of their comfortable homes and valuable estates, without either remorse or compensation. All this, however, it may be said very properly should in a sense be forgotten—buried in the past. A course this, which would seem to be indicated by the great Ruler—the sovereign disposer of all events—and it is one that commends itself to the magnanimity of all true Christian Patriots. And as a matter of fact, I am happy to know, as an old Canadian, that the animosities which long existed between the Americans and Canadians, are gradually sub-

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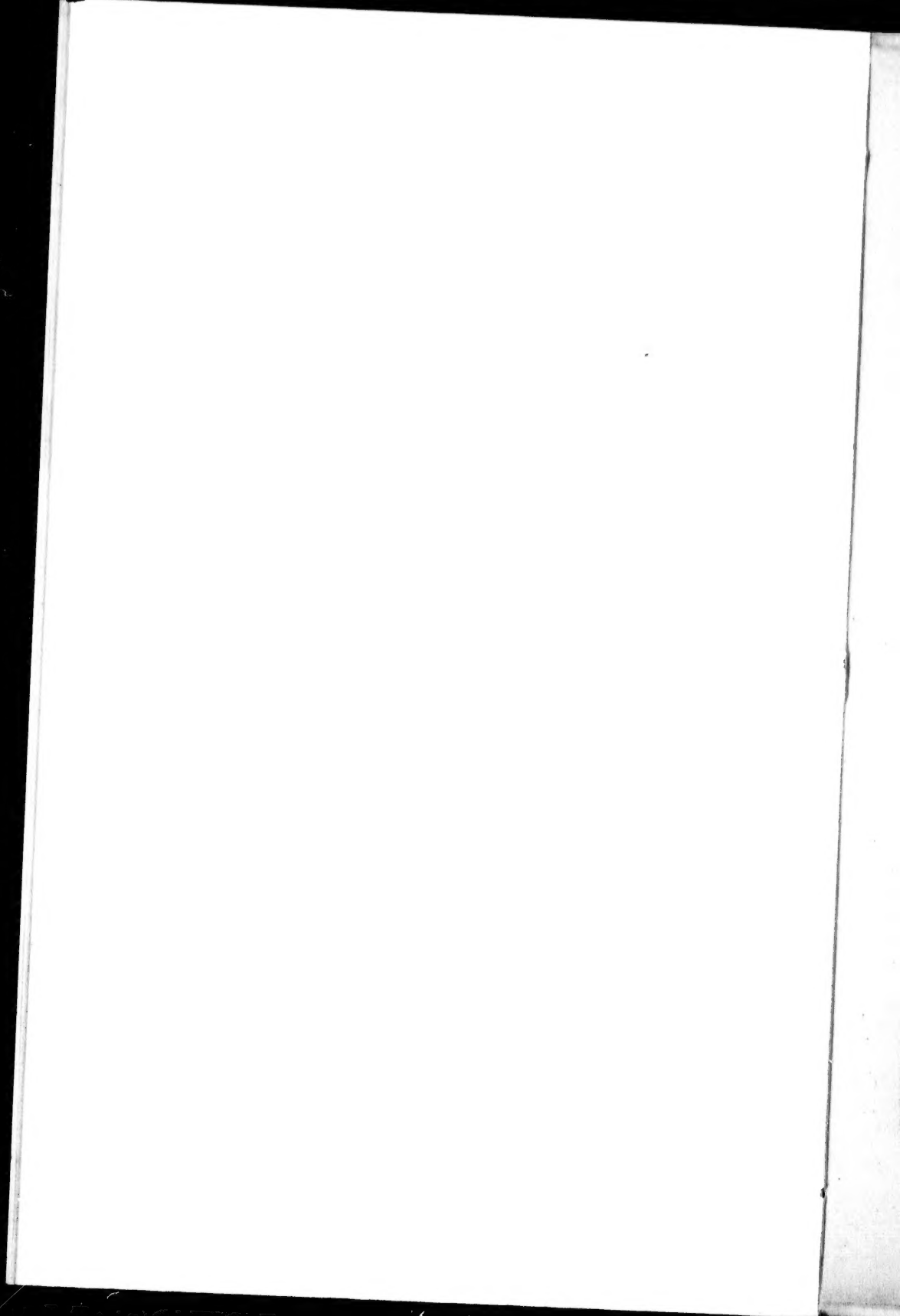
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siding, and are being gradually superseded by feelings of mutual respect and friendship, strengthened by extensive commercial and social relations.

But, while the statesman and politician of the present day, may with advantage study the lesson suggested by the events of those times, let it be our humble occupation to remind you of the sufferings, the hardships, incident to the pioneer life, and recount the motives that actuated the self-denying heroism of those who laid the corner stone of this great Province of Ontario.

The obstacles, privations, and miseries the U. E. Loyalists had to encounter may be readily imagined in coming to a country where the primeval forest covered the earth, and where the only path was the river or the lake. Upper Canada was then unknown, or known only as a region of dense wilderness and swamps, of venomous reptiles and beasts of prey, the hunting grounds and encampments of numerous Indian tribes, intense cold of winter, and with no other redeeming natural feature except abundance of game and fish.

Within my own recollection, all this part of the Province, known formerly as the Newcastle District, now the counties of Northumberland and Durham—so beautiful and wealthy—was almost an unbroken forest. A little more than sixty years ago, in passing through this neighborhood on my way to York, there were to be seen only a few houses, certainly not more than half a dozen, where now is situated the picturesque town we inhabit. And of by far the greater portion of this remarkable transformation in these parts, I have myself been an eyewitness, having been Rector of the parish of Darlington for the last two and thirty years.

But our Canadian fathers were willing to live anywhere, endure any toil, undergo any privations, so long as they were in British Dominions, and often declared that their bones should lie on the king's soil. They settled chiefly in Lower Canada, on the northern banks of the St. Lawrence, between Montreal and Kingston, on the Bay of Quinte, Prince Edward, the frontiers of the Niagra District, and the northern shore of Lake Erie. Their journeyings thither were of untold hardship, privation and exposure, and occupied in many instances from two to three months. To gain the north shore of the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario especially, was a task of no ordinary nature, and their progress towards those points, was as it were, inch by inch, attended by hard and venturesome labour. Supplied with limited comforts, often only the actual necessities of life, they advanced slowly by day along dangerous paths, and at night rested under the open canopy of heaven. They were not unfrequently reduced to the verge of starvation. This was specially the case the second year after their settlement of the Bay of Quinte country. The government at Quebec was to provide food for two years as it could not be expected that men could go into the woods with their families and clear up and raise enough for their support, the first or even second year. The second year's government supply, through

some bad management, was frozen up in the lower part of the St. Lawrence, and in consequence the people were reduced to a state of famine. One of the finest farms that can now be seen at the Bay of Quinte, was offered, it is said for a half hundred of flour, and refused. A very respectable old lady—whose offspring are now luxuriating in comfort above the middle walks of life, it is related, was wont in those days to wander away early in the spring to the woods and gather and eat the buds of the basswood, and then bring an apron or basketful home to the children. Glad were they to pluck the rye and barley heads, as soon as the kernel had formed, for food; and not many miles from the town of Picton, a beef's bone passed from house to house, and was boiled again and again in order to extract some nutriment. It seems incredulous, but it is declared to be no fiction.

Those early settlers were indeed trained for years in the school of adversity, but overcoming by degrees every obstacle in the way of their advancement, the wilderness, by their labour, energy and enterprise, soon blossomed into a goodly fruitful land.

From first to last, in daring and fortitude, our U. E. Loyalist fathers were men of no ordinary stamp, and did not come behind the most renowned adventurers of antiquity. Some of them were endowed with great natural abilities and had received a good education and the greater part of them were men of sound church principles and ardent piety. In the learned professions even, there were to be found a few well read men, some of whom distinguished themselves in the legislature of the Province. When these, our fathers, came, in the course of years to legislate for their loved country, they brought a ripe experience to the task of providing for its various necessities.

To supply the want of literature and the fine arts, we have their laws and institutions which bear the stamp of transcendent wisdom and foresight. We need but instance two of their Legislative enactments. In the earliest Parliament of Upper Canada an Act was passed to prevent the further introduction of slaves, and to limit the time of contract for servitude within the Province, and this was done seventy years before slavery was abolished in the United States, where it is known to be their boast that "all men are born free and equal." Thus our U. E. Loyalist legislators from the first, decreed that Canadian "Britons never shall be slaves." And their freedom to be rational, should, they determined, be based on public intelligence under a system of general and sound education. Hence provision was made in those early days, by the munificence of our fathers, for the founding of Grammar Schools and Colleges throughout the province. The promotion of sound learning in public Seminaries and of general education among the people, were objects which lay very near their hearts. Whoever may think it worth his while to look into the laws of Upper Canada, will find the broad basis of our present system of Education carefully laid by our wise and provident

fathers. We have built upon the foundation which they had laid. In regard to that point, I know whereof I affirm, having been for some years officially at the head of one of our Universities, and having also, in that period, administered, as chief Superintendent of Education, the Common School Act of 1844.

Are we not, therefore, primarily indebted to their wise and liberal policy for the vast number of our public and High Schools, as well as those Institutions for higher Education, which are an honor to the Dominion, even to the Empire at large?

Nor were our U. E. Loyalist fathers other than liberal patrons and promoters of the great agricultural and other material interests of Western Canada. Is it then too much to say that the thousand smiling villages, large and flourishing towns and cities, and innumerable well-cultivated farms within our borders, with the untold millions of acres of fertile territory in our magnificent North-West, fast filling up with the right kind of immigration, all pointing to a glorious destiny in our future, are but the legitimate results of the integrity, and devotion to a principle which they held sacred, of the fathers of Upper Canada, a hundred years ago?

And now, in finishing this hasty and imperfect sketch of the worthies of Upper Canada in her first age, while I repeat and emphasize the fact that they were the steady friends, the active promoters, and the fearless champions of *Christian Loyalty*, I must not fail to add, that, in truth, the patriots and heroes of later times and their associates—the Loyal Militia and Volunteers of Ontario, who have been the chief means under God, at different periods of our Colonial history, of preserving this country to Great Britain, have faithfully followed up and finished what their gallant sires had more than begun. While therefore, we commemorate the heroism and perils of the men of 1784, we can never forget our indebtedness to the defenders of our frontier, of a thousand miles, in the war of 1812, who with the aid of but a few regiments of regular soldiers, so eminently resisted the whole military power of an adjoining nation—nor our obligations to those loyal militia and volunteers who put down the rebellion of 1837, as well as to those brave young men of the "Queen's Own," who, at the immense risk of the sacrifice of life, enthusiastically hastened, at the sudden call of duty, to repel the infamous Fenian raiders from our soil at Ridgeway.

Hence, while the merits of our militia and volunteer force have always been duly appreciated by our own people, it is no marvel that they have commanded the admiration of the highest Military Authorities in England.

Among other things, the congratulations received by our Canadian teams at Wimbledon, from those distinguished personages, amply prove the high estimation in which they are held in the mother country. I have personally listened to those commendations, and as a Canadian felt proud of them, as I had felt years before, when, at a Levy at the Horse Guards, His Royal Highness, The Duke of Cambridge, Command-

er-in-Chief, expressed his admiration of the pluck of our men at the Ridgeway affair—which had just then occurred—at the same time desiring me to assure my Canadian fellow subjects on my return home, of the unabated interest felt by the Royal Family and Imperial Military Authorities, in all our endeavours to improve this branch of the Militia service for the defence of the Dominion; and also that Canada might depend upon being amply supported in any future necessity by the Military and Naval Forces of the Empire. Mention is made of these facts for the encouragement of young Canadian volunteers, and, with the same object, perhaps I may be permitted to add, that any special marks of Royal or Imperial favour, of which in years gone by I have been the fortunate recipient, have been chiefly owing to the fact that I am a native Canadian and the grandson of one of “the U. E. Loyalist fathers of Upper Canada.”

I may say, finally, that the same spirit that characterized the loyalists of 1784, the militia and volunteers of 1812, and those of 1837 and 1866, breathes in their descendants now, who, almost to a man, I am perfectly satisfied, are at this hour in heart and soul, “United Empire Loyalists,” and who in the future, as in the past, will resist to the death all efforts, whether from intestine or foreign foes, to dismember the glorious empire of Her Gracious Majesty, our Noble Queen.

A few unscrupulous and self-seeking men undoubtedly there are, as in all other countries, who wish for change, but that the heart of the Dominion of Canada in that regard, is politically sound to the very core, is, in my judgment, a moral certainty.

In conclusion, let me remind you, dear brethren, of the great and solemn fact, that one generation passeth away to make room for another. “The fathers, where are they?” We shall soon follow them, and our children will come and lie down quietly by our side. When another hundred years shall have passed away not one who hears me to day will be alive to commemorate the second Centennial of the landing of the U. E. Loyalists. But the same sun will shine, the same valleys will smile and sing, the same church will live, and the same God and Saviour will reign. May we not hope, also, that a glorious destiny awaits unborn generations, who will look back with thrilling interest to the U. E. Loyalists as *their fathers*? And then who can describe with what rapture they shall, on the shores of two oceans, and throughout all the vast intervening regions, unite in one grand double chorus, in our famous old National Anthem, and in that divinely inspired song, “Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!”

And now, to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all praise and glory, Might, Majesty and Dominion, henceforth and for evermore! Amen.

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